

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-12 HA-05 /101 W
-----083835 120832Z /13
R 120357Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7356
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEHRAN 02464

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PGOV SHUM IR
SUBJ: SHAH'S VIEWS ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

REF: A. TEHRAN 2089, B. MARCH 6 USINFO RE RANDAL-SHAH
INTERVIEW

SUMMARY: SHAH'S RECENT INTERVIEW WITH WASHPOST'S JONATHAN RANDAL AND AMIR TAHERI ANALYSIS PUBLISHED TEHRAN GIVE GOOD INSIGHT INTO SHAH'S VIEWS ON CONTINUED LIBERALIZATION (REF A), WHICH ARE SHARED MORE OR LESS ENTHUSIASTICALLY BY MOST HIGH ECHELON IRANIAN ELITE. TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW (STORY CARRIED REF B) AND TEXT OF ARTICLE BEING POUCHED DEPARTMENT. SHAH WANTS CONTINUED LIBERALIZATION AND IS PREPARED TO LIVE WITH SOME VIOLENCE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY PUTTING HEAT ON LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS TO HANDLE AFFAIRS WITH INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION TO MINIMIZE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF OPPOSITIONIST ACTIVITIES. TAKEN IN CONTEXT DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN OVER PAST EIGHT MONTHS, THIS GIVES VERY DIFFERENT PICTURE OF SHAH AND IRANIAN MODERNIZATION THAN UNEDUCATED BUT WIDESPREAD VIEW OF SHAH AS MEGALOMANIAC BENT ON REPRESSING HIS PEOPLE AND GATHERING ARMS FOR CONQUEST, A VIEW WHICH IRANIAN OPPOSITIONIST GROUPS HAVE BEEN PROPAGATING FOR SOME TIME IN U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE.
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FOR PURPOSE OF ENCOURAGING FURTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCES IN IRAN EMBASSY BELIEVES IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF USG AND OTHERS PLAYED ON THEMES DEVELOPED BY SHAH IN APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS RATHER THAN WHAT IRANIANS REFER TO AS WESTERN OBSESSION WITH CIVIL RIGHTS LEGALISMS. END SUMMARY.

1. SHAH-RANDAL INTERVIEW TOOK LINE THAT, DESPITE ACTIVITY OF DISSIDENTS, LIBERALIZATION WILL CONTINUE. SHAH DISPARAGED OPPOSITION TRYING TO TEACH HIM HUMAN RIGHTS WHEN THEY WERE "THE MOST INTRACTABLE PERSONS WHO DID NOT LIVE ONE DAY WITHOUT MARTIAL LAW...", WHILE THEY WERE IN POWER (REFERRING TO MOSSADEQ PERIOD). HE MADE POINT PUBLICLY FOR FIRST TIME THAT NOT ALL RELIGIOUS LEADERS BELONG IN CATEGORY OF "BLACK REACTIONARIES", AND ACKNOWLEDGED TABRIZ RIOTS FEB 18 WERE SUBSTANTIALLY DUE TO BAD MANAGEMENT BY OFFICIALS. HE NOTED GUILTY OFFICIALS WERE BEING PUNISHED AND EVEN, IN RELAXED JIBE ON THIS SUBJECT, ACKNOWLEDGED SAVAK NEGLIGENCE--"NOW WE HEAR THAT FOR THREE-FOUR DAYS THEY (DEMONSTRATORS) WERE PREPARING ALL THOSE STICKS... YOU CAN'T DO THAT IN ONE HOUR. AND THAT'S WHY PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR RANKS (POSITIONS) BECAUSE WE NEVER GOT ONE SERIOUS REPORT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY INCIDENTS THERE. AND YOU ARE CALLING OUR SAVAK MORE EFFICIENT OR WORSE THAN THE KGB, THAT THEY HAVE SPIES EVERYWHERE. WELL, (CHUCKLE) IN THE CASE OF TABRIZ THAT WAS NOT TRUE." INTERESTINGLY, WHEN SHAH WAS INVITED BY RANDAL TO RELATE QOM AND TABRIZ DISTURBANCES TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S ESPOUSAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS, SHAH CHIDED RANDAL NOTING LIBERALIZATION BEGAN WELL BEFORE CARTER ELECTION. HE LINKED DISTURBANCES DIRECTLY TO LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM, AND SAID THIS WAS PRICE IRAN HAD TO PAY BECAUSE OF RIGHT AND LEFT INTEREST IN FOMENTING TROUBLE. HE DID NOT LEAN
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ON "FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT" THEME. WHILE DEPRECIATING VIEWS, OF OPPOSITIONISTS, SHAH NEVERTHELESS TOLD RANDAL THAT "ANY SUGGESTION THAT COULD BE POSITIVE FOR THE COUNTRY WILL BE RECEIVED WHOLEHEARTEDLY--WHY NOT?". SEEMS CLEAR THAT SHAH HAD THOUGHT OUT ANSWERS TO RANDAL QUESTIONS ON LIBERALIZATION AND HAS NOW TWICE GONE ON RECORD AS READY TO STICK TO HIS GAME PLAN FOR IMMEDIATE AND MEDIUM TERM FUTURE. SHAH LISTED POLITICAL AIMS AS GUARANTEEING FREEDOM, PUTTING POWER INTO HANDS OF PEOPLE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION OF ADMINISTRATION TO VILLAGE AND PROVINCIAL COUNCILS AND PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT GOVERNORS. SHAH CONTINUED THAT LIBERALIZATION DID NOT MEAN HE WOULD NOT DEFEND COUNTRY BUT BASIS OF STATE AND SOCIETY STRONG ENOUGH TO ALLOW "AT LEAST THIS LIMIT AND EVEN MORE".

2. TAHERI ARTICLE, WHICH WE UNDERSTAND WAS INSPIRED IF NOT PARTIALLY WRITTEN BY COURT MINISTRY SOURCES, EXPANDS ON DOMESTIC THEME IN SHAH'S REMARKS AND GIVES RATIONALE FOR SHAH'S APPROACH TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL AFFAIRS. PIECE MAKES FOLLOWING BASIC POINTS: A) WHILE IRAN HAD WIDE GULF BETWEEN RICH AND POOR, POLITICAL DEMOCRATIZATION WAS NOT POSSIBLE: B) REMARKABLE PROGRESS OF PAST 15 YEARS HAS NOW

BROUGHT IRAN TO POINT WHERE IT CAN RECONSTRUCT ITS POLITICAL LIFE ACROSS A SPECTRUM IN WHICH EXTREMES "CANNOT BUT BE CONFINED TO SMALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY"; C) SHAH, IN NEW BOOK "TOWARDS THE GREAT CIVILIZATION", HAS SAID POLITICAL LIFE MUST BE BROUGHT INTO LINE WITH ECONOMIC/SOCIAL ADVANCES AND DANGERS THAT DO EXIST FROM EXTREMES SHOULD NOT BE OVER-ESTIMATED; D) SHAH-PEOPLE REVOLUTION WIDELY ACCEPTED AND NOW IT IS POSSIBLE TO RECRUIT POLITICAL ORGANIZERS FROM BEYOND NARROW LIMITS OF THOSE TRAINED IN EXTREMIST TRADITIONS (EX-TUDEH MEMBERS) OR TECHNOCRATS WHO FEARED POLITICS: AND D) PROGRESS OF LIBERALIZATION BEGAN TWO YEARS

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USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-12 HA-05 /101 W

-----083841 120831Z /13

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7357

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AGO WITH EASING OF CENSORSHIP AND HAS CONTINUED WITH AMNESTIES FOR PRISONERS, REVISION OF MILITARY TRIBUNAL LAW, RED CROSS REVIEW OF PRISONS AND CREATION OF RESURGENCE PARTY. FINAL THRUST OF ARTICLE IS THAT "BOTH ADMINISTRATION AND ITS CRITICS HAVE TO SEEK GENUINE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THEIR IDEAS. THEY CAN NO LONGER EXPECT THE MONARCHY TO DO ALL THEIR POLITICAL WORK FOR THEM."

3. ABOVE IS, OF COURSE, PATTERN OF INTENT AS MUCH AS ACTUAL DESCRIPTION OF SITUATION. EMBASSY BELIEVES RIGHT AND LEFT ARE NOT AS WEAK AS TAHERI STATES THEY ARE, AND IRAN MAY NOT YET QUITE BE TO POINT WHERE MIDDLE CLASS MODERATES CAN ASSUME GREATER ROLE WITH EASE. PROBLEM OF CONTROLLING DEMONSTRATIONS WILL REQUIRE OFFICIALS TO EXERCISE JUDGEMENT AND ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY, ELEMENTS WHICH HAVE NOT HERETOFORE BEEN REQUIRED OF THEM IN IRANIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM. POLITICAL FOCUS OF PAST 30 YEARS ON CENTER SUGGESTS TO US AND TO MANY KNOWLEDGEABLE IRANIAN OBSERVERS THAT DECENTRALIZATION WILL BE A LONG-TIME

PROCESS, BUT AT LEAST IT IS MODESTLY UNDERWAY. MOST OF THOSE IN GOVERNMENT OR IN PRIVATE SECTOR WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED HAVE WELCOMED SHAH/GOI DECISION TO GO AHEAD WITH LIBERALIZATION DESPITE PRIVATE CYCICISM ABOUT DEGREE OF FREEDOM WHICH WILL BE POSSIBLE. THIS CONTRASTS RATHER CONFIDENTIAL

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STARKLY WITH STEREOTYPE "STREET" VIEW OF SHAH AS BRUTAL TYRANT BENT ON OPPRESSING PEOPLE AND GATHERING ARMS FOR CONQUEST, WHICH HIS OPPONENTS HAVE BEEN ASSIDUOUSLY PROPAGATING OVER PAST SIX YEARS.

4. BELIEVE SHAH'S PUBLIC STATEMENT OF POSITIONS HERE OFFERS USEFUL CHANCE FOR USG AND OTHERS TO TAILOR FURTHER APPROACHES ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO IRANIAN "HOMEGROWN" THEMES RATHER THAN WHAT IRANIANS REFER TO AS WESTERN LEGALISMS. FOR INSTANCE, IMPROVEMENTS IN IRANIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM COULD BE ADVANCED IN TERMS OF BUILDING FUTURE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION TO MATCH IRAN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS. POINT S THAT CAREFUL READING OF SHAH'S VIEWS AS EXPRESSED IN ANDAL INTERVIEW AND TAHERI ARTICLE SHOULD SUGGEST, NOT ONLY TO DEPT BUT TO ORGANIZATIONS AS DIVERSE AS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS, OPENINGS THROUGH WHICH TO BRING THEIR CONCERNS TO IANIAN ATTENTION IN WAYS WHICH SUPPORT WHAT GOI IS TRYING TO DO WHILE MINIMIZING XENOPHOBIC REACTION. SULLIVAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SHAH, PRESS CONFERENCES, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TEHRAN02464
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780110-0862
Format: TEL
From: TEHRAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780378/aaaacnss.tel
Line Count: 201
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 855e74c8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 TEHRAN 2089
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3358054
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SHAH'S VIEWS ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS
TAGS: PINS, PGOV, SHUM, IR, (PAHLAVI, MOHAMMED REZA)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/855e74c8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014